Being connected and engaged with our community and others often becomes more important as we get older, perhaps because there is more time for connections and we see our social circles begin to shrink. Social engagement is associated with a higher quality of life and reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness. The American Association of Retired Persons organization defines loneliness as dissatisfaction with the quantity or quality of a person's social relationships. In contrast, social isolation is defined as an objective lack of social networks and access to information and resources. For example, you can be surrounded by people and still feel lonely. Loneliness and isolation are growing issues for older adults, and they can impact an older adults' health. A study conducted by the National Institute of Aging and the National Institutes of Health shows loneliness and isolation have similar effects on mortality as obesity and cigarette smoking. Fortunately, there are many opportunities for older adults to be connected and engaged in their communities.

First, ask how they are connected and engaged. Maybe they are connected to their church, a recreation center or weekly senior breakfast. Follow up by asking if they ever feel lonely or isolated. Ask if they are interested in learning about events and activities and if they might like help exploring other opportunities. If so, ask them what types of activities they enjoy and see if they might be interested in reengaging in things they used to do. A quick web search or a visit to the local library or a senior center can present nearby options.

There might be barriers that are keeping them from pursuing opportunities they like. Several barriers that might come up include:

- Transportation issues
- Unaware of activity
- Caregiving responsibilities
- Nervous about stepping outside of comfort zone
- Funding
- Time commitments

Brainstorm ways to address the barrier(s) or explore other options that might be a good fit.
Exploring new activity options gives you the opportunity to present different types of engagement. Here are some engagement options you can bring up:

**Volunteering**

The Corporation for National and Community Service says people who volunteer live longer and volunteering leads to greater life satisfaction and lower rates of depression. Start the search for a new volunteer opportunity by visiting [www.volunteermatch.org](http://www.volunteermatch.org).

**Lifelong Learning**

Is there something they have always wanted to learn about? There are often low-cost or free lifelong learning classes at community centers, colleges, libraries or hospitals.

**Civic Involvement**

Maybe your loved one is ready to take their volunteer work to the next level and work to make a difference in their community. Connect and get involved with a nearby neighborhood association or civic group.

**Recreation**

From playing a team sport to learning a new hobby, there is a recreation option for everyone. Locate a nearby community center at [http://www.211texas.org/](http://www.211texas.org/).

**Spirituality**

Having an active spiritual life or staying involved with a faith community can be a great way to stay engaged. Help address any barriers there might be to your loved one staying involved in their faith community.

Need more activity ideas? Visit [https://connect2affect.org/](https://connect2affect.org/) for helpful resources.